

## BIRD NOTES FROM THE MOUTH OF THE MURCHISON RIVER

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The ornithological interest of the country at the mouth of the Murchison River was indicated by the results of the camp-out held there in September 1948, following the Perth congress of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union. As stated in the account of that excursion by Eric H. Sedgwick (*The Emu*, vol. 48, 1949, p. 212), 129 species of birds were met with and important observations were made on geographical distribution. Several species of South-west birds appear to reach their northern limit at or just beyond the mouth of the Murchison River.

As no collecting was done at the R.A.O.U. camp it was not possible to settle some problems which arose from observations made at the time, particularly in regard to the occurrence of *Malurus* species. Therefore when Professor H. Waring, of the Zoology Department of the University of Western Australia, organised a students' camp in the area in August 1949 the Curator, Mr. L. Glauret, seized the opportunity of attaching me to his party to clear up this point and make other collections in the district. I was fortunate in being able to accomplish this objective and my other results offer some supplement to the work of the R.A.O.U. party.

A full description of the area, with a sketch map, is given in *The Emu* article mentioned and I will not repeat this information. Unfortunately we did not have the same good weather as was enjoyed by the previous party; squalls and rain most of the time prevented full opportunities for effective field-work. During my five days observing, from August 7 to 11, I recorded 49 species of birds, of which the four not recorded by the R.A.O.U. party are marked with an asterisk in the following list:—

Emu (*Dromaius novae-hollandiae*), Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia striata*), Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*), Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Australian Pelican (*Pelecanus conspicillatus*), Crested Tern (*Sterna bergii*), Silver Gull (*Larus novae-hollandiae*), Sooty Oyster-catcher (*Haematopus fuliginosus*), Banded Plover (*Zonifer tricolor*), \*Golden Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), Red-capped Dotterel (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), Black-fronted Dotterel (*C. melanops*), \*White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), White Egret (*Egretta alba*), White-faced Heron (*Notophyx novae-hollandiae*), Reef-Heron (*Demigretta sacra*—dark phase), Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Uroaetus audax*), White-breasted Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*), Whistling Eagle (*Haliaeetus sphenurus*), Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), \*Little Corella (*Kakatoe sanguinea*), Galah (*Kakatoe roseicapilla*), Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis pyrrhophanus*), Golden Bronze Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*), Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*), Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*), Willy Wagtail (*R. leucophrys*), Red-capped Robin (*Petroeca goode-*

*novii*), Western Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria griseogularis*), Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*), Western Shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla rufiventris*), Magpie Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*), Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*), White-winged Triller (*Lalage sueurii*), Southern Scrub-robin (*Drymodes brunneopygia*), White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*), Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*), Yellow-tailed Thornbill (*A. chrysorrhoa*), Spotted Scrub-wren (*Scricornis maculatus*), Little Grass-bird (*Megalurus gramineus*), \*Variegated Wren (*Malurus lamberti*), Blue-breasted Wren (*M. pulcherrimus*), Red-tipped Diamond-bird (*Pardalotus substriatus*), Silver-eye (*Zosterops australasiae*), White-fronted Honeyeater (*Gliciphila albigrons*), Brown Honeyeater (*G. indistincta*), Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*), Spiny-checked Honeyeater (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*), Zebra Finch (*Poephila castanotis*) and Western Magpie (*Gymnorhina dorsalis*).

The only birds found nesting were the Whistling Eagle and the Red-capped Dotterel, a pair of each being seen with eggs.

The highlight of the visit was the collecting of two species of the red-shouldered wrens, *Malurus lamberti* and *Malurus pulcherrimus*. Of the former I procured a male in full plumage and of the latter three fully-plumaged males. At the R.A.O.U. camp there was some controversy as to whether both species occurred together, though *M. pulcherrimus* was certainly observed and a specimen had been collected there in 1943 by Dr. D. L. Serventy. In their *Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia*, 1948, Dr. Serventy and Major Whittell give the southern limit of *M. lamberti* as a line joining Sharks Bay, Ebano, Carnamah and about Kalgoorlie, and state that an overlap in the ranges of *M. lamberti* and *M. pulcherrimus* is not known. In *The Emu*, vol. 49, 1949, p. 53, Mr. F. Lawson Whitlock, in a short account of his field experiences with the two species, states his belief that "the Murchison River district is about the northern limit of *M. pulcherrimus* and that it here overlaps in a small way with that of *M. assimilis* (= *lamberti*)." It is very satisfactory to be able to confirm, by the actual collection of specimens, the opinion of this veteran ornithologist. That the two forms should be found together in the same habitat also proves that they are fully distinct species.

It is clear that the R.A.O.U. observers met with both of these species of *Malurus* nesting near the camp, so that they actually met with 130 species of birds during the excursion, and that 49 species were found breeding.

Mr. Sedgwick in his report of the R.A.O.U. excursion does not include the Little Corella (*Kakatoe sanguinea*) but mentions that residents of the area reported seeing a Corella which he did not attempt to identify. A small group of Corellas was present during my stay and though I did not collect a specimen I am quite satisfied, after observing the birds with field-glasses, that they were the small-billed species and not the Long-billed Corella (*K. tenuirostris*) of the South-west.